



County of Erie

CHRIS COLLINS
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

ANTHONY J. BILLITTIER IV, M.D., FACEP
COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH

HEALTH UPDATE #224

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IMPLEMENTATION OF ACIP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INFLUENZA IMMUNIZATION

*Please distribute to immediately to all Emergency Departments, Infection Control Departments, Employee Health Services, Infectious Disease Departments, Pediatrics, Director of Nursing, Medical Director, Pharmacy, Laboratory Director and **all** acute and primary patient care areas.*

ECDOH TIPS FOR SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTING THE EXPANDED ACIP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL CHILDHOOD INFLUENZA IMMUNIZATION

The extraordinary efforts and success of the U.S. public health immunization system and American pediatricians in vaccinating children are the envy of the world. Remarkable reductions in cases of reportable vaccine-preventable illnesses—for many diseases, near 100%--have been achieved. Influenza vaccines, which have been available for many years, are another important immunization tool. Since the numbers of influenza infections far exceed the total for all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined, and since children are responsible for much of the spread of influenza, expanded efforts are being made to improve coverage of influenza vaccination among children.

This year, the age group recommended by the CDC ACIP to receive annual, routine influenza vaccination has been expanded to include all children from 6 months to 18 years of age, a major expansion. In fact, this recommendation adds 30 million additional children to the very large numbers included in previous recent recommendations (healthy children 6 months-5 years of age, children with chronic diseases, and all the contacts of them; plus contacts of infants <6 months of age, and contacts of the elderly and chronically ill adults; this totals near 200 million Americans).

To begin to implement the expanded recommendation is going to take major planning and effort. The results—less influenza morbidity and mortality and more satisfied patients—make the effort worthwhile.

What follows is a suggested guideline:

First, schedule a staff meeting of your office or clinic-- everybody needs to attend.

- Prepare your **entire** staff before the season as they are often the main source of information for parents
 - Stress the importance of vaccination
 - Flu can be much worse than a cold, sometimes even leading to serious medical conditions and/or hospitalizations
 - Note that the CDC recommends that all children 6 months through 18 years of age should be vaccinated against the flu
 - Children aged 2 years to 17 years have the highest annual rates of infection and are the primary transmitters of infection
 - Consider the health of grandparents or family members who may be in close contact with the children
 - Discuss vaccination options and address staff concerns so staff members are comfortable answering parents' questions. Familiarize yourself and staff about influenza vaccine options
 - Trivalent inactivated vaccine (TIV) is licensed by 5 manufacturers. Only Fluzone comes in a thimerosal-free form indicated for young children (i.e., 6 months-3 years old)
 - Live attenuated influenza vaccine (LAIV) is indicated for healthy individuals ages 2-49 years. The licensed product, FluMist is not a shot; it is a gentle mist that is sprayed into the nose. It does not contain thimerosal
 - In the only influenza head-to-head efficacy study reported to date, children who got FluMist had fewer cases of flu than those who received TIV.
 - Review influenza vaccination policies, processes and forms
 - Write and use Standing Orders (see www.immunize.org)
- Make sure all staff are on board with your recommendations

Second, vaccinate your staff as soon as vaccine is available. Since many health care providers (and patients) are needle-phobic, it's a good idea to offer both injectable (TIV) and nasal spray (LAIV) vaccines.

Third, with the expanded ACIP recommendation, consider basing your vaccine needs on your patient population, rather than on the number of doses given last year. Verify insurance companies' coverage. Call carriers, verify coverage (for all age groups), discuss reimbursement; use ACIP/MMWR/AAP flu statement to reinforce coverage. Both TIV and LAIV are provided by VFC and covered by >90% of private insurance plans. Re-check coverage before and throughout the vaccination season, which spans August to May.

Fourth, remind patients about the importance of influenza vaccination and vaccination options with:

- Signs, posters and videos in waiting rooms and exam rooms – highlight the expanded ACIP recommendations
- On-hold phone messages
- Information on practice web site, in practice newsletter, on bills, and appointment reminders
- Consider a reminder system, via EMR, state registry or by hand

Next, vaccinate at *ALL* opportunities:

- Vaccinate early
 - CDC/ACIP encourages vaccination to begin as soon as vaccine is available and throughout the season
- Vaccinate at all appropriate opportunities
 - Assess vaccination status of patients at every visit
 - Provide vaccination during:
 - Well visits, sports and camp physicals, chronic condition re-checks (e.g., acne, ADHD), visits for injuries or minor illnesses
 - Consider immunizing parents and siblings when they accompany others for office visits
- Consider alternate hours for vaccination + during regular office hours
 - Schedule influenza vaccination clinics at convenient hours for patients (e.g., early mornings, weekends, and evenings)
 - Utilize your staff effectively - hold clinics where staff administer flu vaccine only
 - Clinics may work best when flu vaccine patients are separate from regular patients
 - Clinics can be walk-in, scheduled slots, or block-scheduling
 - Prepare the product in advance of patient arrival
- Have parents complete paperwork in advance of their arrival at the office
 - Consider providing the forms during a prior visit or by email or on your website
 - Identify which vaccination option is right for the patients in advance
 - Consider employee motivational incentives to account for additional workload

Finally, remember that influenza is a very common disease in children, with the potential for serious morbidity and mortality. As vaccination champions, health care personnel have the opportunity to add a feather to our caps, and move towards the eradication of another vaccine-preventable disease. Most importantly, your recommendation matters.

References and useful resources include:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Internet]. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; c2008. [Press Release], CDC's Advisory Committee Recommends Influenza Vaccination for Children 6 Months Through 18 Years of Age [cited 2008 Apr 27]; Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/od/oc/media/pressrel/2008/r080227.htm>
2. Briss PA, Rodewald LE, Hinman AR, et al. *Am J Prev Med*. 2000 Jan;18(1 Suppl):97-140.
3. Szilagyi PG, Iwane MK, Schaffer S, et al. *Pediatrics*. 2003 Oct;112(4):821-8.
4. Judelsohn, RG. SOAPM News, AAP (in press)

Additional information and links:

Influenza vaccination recommendations: www.cdc.gov/influenza

Vaccine Reminder Recall Systems: A Practical Guide for Pediatric Practices *Immunization Initiatives*
Newsletter - February 2005 <http://practice.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=170&nodeID=4008>

Template Letter: Denying or Reducing Reimbursement for Immunization Administration
<http://practice.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=932&nodeID=4008>

Best Practices: Applying Management Analysis of Excellence to Immunization *Immunization Initiatives*
Newsletter - November 2005 <http://practice.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=564&nodeID=4008>

Template Letter: Bundling Immunization Administration with Vaccine Product Reimbursement
<http://practice.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=934&nodeID=4008>

Managed Care Contract Issues
<http://practice.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=380&nodeID=4008>

Vaccines: A Survival Guide for Pediatricians
<http://practice.aap.org/content.aspx?aid=1940&nodeID=4008>

Search for upcoming vaccination clinic schedules: <http://www.immunizewny.org/>

Health Category Definitions:

Health Alert FLASH: conveys the highest level of importance due to a large-scale, catastrophic public health emergency; warrants immediate action or attention

Health Alert Priority: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention to a health problem or situation

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary